



May 2021

Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism

Indian Diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific Region: Historical and Contemporary Engagements

Prakash C. Jain



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Global Research Forum on
Diaspora and Transnationalism

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Abstract

This paper highlights the salient features of the Indian Diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific region in the context of the on-going globalisation as well as historically. It briefly discusses the origins and evolution of the Indian diaspora in 20 countries of the region consisting of 11 ASEAN countries and nine others. It is argued that the modern Indian diaspora in this region was caused by the British colonialism in India and abroad. Indians emigrated as indentured, kangani/maistry and voluntary labourers to work on rubber, rice, sugar, tea, coffee, and oil-palm plantations. The Indian traders and various categories of office workers also migrated to Hong Kong, Philippines, Japan, Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Fiji. In all these and other countries of the region, namely Australia, New Zealand and Thailand the Indian immigrants included entrepreneurs, engineers, doctors, accountants, managers, IT professionals, etc. Migration patterns and population estimates apart, the major focus of the article however is on the impact of the Indian Diaspora on the economic development, political processes and socio-cultural affairs of the host countries. It also highlights the diaspora-homeland relations, including Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Awards given to the select eminent overseas Indians of the region

Keywords: Indian Diaspora, Globalisation, ASEAN-Pacific region, Migration patterns, Indentured, Kangani/Maistry labour, Diaspora-homeland relations.

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Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).

Indian Diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific Region: Historical and Contemporary Engagements

Prakash C. Jain

Introduction

This paper highlights the salient features of the Indian Diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific region in the context of the on-going globalisation as well as historically. It briefly discusses the origins and evolution of the Indian diaspora in 20 countries of the region consisting of 11 ASEAN countries and nine others. ASEAN is the acronym for Association of South-East Asian Nations that comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. Nine other countries included in this study are: Australia, China, Fiji, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan.

It is a well-known fact that the modern Indian diaspora was caused by the British colonialism in India and the region. Indians emigrated as indentured, *kangani/maistry* and voluntary labourers to work on rubber, rice, sugar, tea, coffee, and oil-palm plantations in various British colonies. The Indian traders and various categories of office workers also migrated to Hong Kong, Philippines, Japan, Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Fiji. Indians in these countries have been part of the so-called “Old Indian Diaspora”. Elsewhere in the region, namely Australia, New Zealand and Thailand the Indians have been a part of the “New Indian Diaspora” that included engineers, doctors, accountants, managers, IT professionals, etc. Migration patterns and population estimates apart, the major focus of the article however is on the impact of the Indian Diaspora on the economic development, political processes and socio-cultural affairs of the host countries. The analysis is done in the political economy conceptual framework.

“Diaspora” means dispersal and until recently the term referred to the Jews living in different parts of the world outside Israel - their ancestral “homeland”. Of late, however, the purview of the term diaspora has been broadened to refer to any ethnic/national population group settled abroad but maintaining close links with its

homeland. As such diasporas can be defined as “ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with countries of origin - homelands” (Sheffer 1986).

Modern diasporas constitute trans-state triadic networks involving ethnic diasporas, their host countries and homelands, and as such they have significant ramifications for international relations and international politics, and other activities. The ties diasporic communities maintain through visits, marriages, trades networks, transfer of technology and skills and political lobbying for homelands are some other aspects of diasporic activities. Before we move on to the main focus of this study, it would be useful to have a brief look at the Indian global diaspora in terms of its formation, growth, spread and strength.

The Global Indian Diaspora

The modern Indian Diaspora is about 200 years old – largely a creation of British colonialism in India and some other countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania and the West Indies. Modern emigration from India was completely a British creation. It began in 1834 following the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. Labour was needed to work on the sugar plantations in the various British colonies. Without dependable supplies of labour, survival of plantations would have been extremely difficult. Consequently, the British colonists followed the practice of Latin American and Cuban colonists who were importing Chinese indentured labour from the Portuguese settlement of Macao (Campbell, 1969). Indian labourers had already been found useful in various colonies where as slaves and convicted prisoners they were employed in public works – roads, harbours, offices and jails (Sandhu 1969: 132- 140; Tinker 1974: 44-46).

In India, as Kingsley Davis (1968: 99) has pointed out, “Pressure to emigrate has always been great enough to provide a stream of emigrants much larger than the actual given opportunities”. Large scale Indian emigration, however, did not take place until the establishment of British imperialism in India as well as many other parts of the world. Burma, for example, is a case in point where Indian emigration was numerically insignificant, and only seasonal in nature until the annexation of the Irrawaddy Delta and northern territory by the British East India Company in 1852 (Andrew 1933). Pearn (1946: 5) notes the presence of only 19 Indians in Rangoon in 1838. Similarly, Indian labour emigration to Malaysia, Ceylon, Mauritius and the West Indies, and petty bourgeoisie emigration to East Africa had to wait for British colonial settlement in these places. Thus Indian overseas emigration is obviously the result of the workings of British colonialism both in India and abroad which is highlighted by the fact that the vast majority of Indians migrated only to the British colonies. Only two exceptions in this regard were the Reunion Islands and Surinam – French and Dutch colonies respectively.

The historical background against which the Indian overseas emigration was intensified was the penetration of British mercantile capitalism in Asia. In the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the communication revolution and the opening of the Suez Canal the Asian peripheral economies were fully integrated into the world capitalist system with the result that Britain earned a considerable surplus on her trade with Asia in general, and India in particular (Latham 1978: 175).

The profits from imperial trade were invested by the British in the mines and plantations in Asia and Africa, which created a further demand for labour throughout the British Empire. While the expanding capitalist economy in the British Empire created a great demand for labour and trading classes, in India a combination of the following factors led to the Indian exodus overseas: the distress of the small peasantry, frequent and widespread famines in the throughout the nineteenth century, the decline of the handicraft industry, and sluggish and enclavist industrialization. Excessive dependence on agriculture, seasonal unemployment, mass illiteracy and a caste-bound occupational structure, were additional contributory factors in creating a class of proletarians, a fraction of which was compelled to seek sustenance abroad. Under these circumstances, the British Indian government was readily persuaded by

the imperial and other colonial governments to export Indian labour abroad.

Until the World War II Indians emigrated mainly as indentured labourers to British Guiana, Trinidad, Surinam (then a Dutch colony), South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius and Reunion Islands, and as *kangani/maistry* labourers to Burma, Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka. Indians also emigrated as traders and government employees to the East and South African countries besides Fiji and South Africa (Arasaratnam 1970; Gillion 1962; Jain 1970; Jain 1990; 1999; Kondapi 1951; Mahajani 1960; Sandhu 1969; Tinker 1974; 1977).

Following the World War II Indian migration to the industrially advanced countries of Europe and North America, Australia, New Zealand etc. had also begun to gain momentum (Jain 1989; Khadaria 1999; Leckie 2007). The post-war economic expansion in these countries created heavy demand for skilled labour and professionals. Simultaneously, immigration laws were also relaxed in Canada, UK and the US. (Jain 1993; Khadaria 2006). This form of overseas Indian migration of skilled and educated personnel, earlier popularly known as the “brain drain”, thus resulted in the formation of sizeable Indian communities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the US, UK and many other countries of the world (Helweg and Helweg 1990; McGee 1989). Since the early 1970s Indians have also been migrating in large numbers to the oil-rich West Asian countries (Jain 2007; 2012). There were about 8.5 million non-resident Indians working in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries just before the Covid-19 Pandemic. Elsewhere in the region Yemen and Israel have also been hosting a significant number of Indians (Jain 2007; Jain and Oommen 2016). The total strength of the global Indian Diaspora in 2018 was estimated by the Government of India at 32.1 million (MEA 2018). Presently this figure must have gone up to about 35 million.

Historically, five distinctive patterns of Indian economic emigration can be identified: (1) indentured labour emigration, (2) *kangani/maistry* labour emigration, (3) ‘free’ or ‘passage’ emigration to East Africa, South Africa, Fiji etc, (4) ‘brain drain’ type, or voluntary emigration of skilled/educated manpower to the metropolitan countries of Europe, North America and Oceania, and indeed other countries of the world, and (5) manpower emigration to West Asia. Whereas the first three patterns are often categorized as colonial and

the resultant diasporas as “old”, the last two patterns are post-colonial that gave rise to the “new” diasporas (Jain 1989; Jain 1993).

The “new” Indian diasporas mainly represent India’s “soft power”, and have clear linkages with the process of globalisation that can be defined as “the intensified and deepened cultural, economic, political and institutional interconnectedness and interdependency that has developed between corporations, communities and states, particularly since the 1970s” (Walton-Roberts 2004: 54). Globalisation implies that there is worldwide financial, economic, technological and ecological interdependence”, and as such “goods, capital, knowledge, images, communication, crime, culture, pollutants, drugs, fashions and beliefs all readily flow across territorial boundaries” (Cohen 1999: 155). So much so that some scholars argue that globalisation is leading to the emergence of “the first global civilization” – a discrete world-order with shared values, processes and structures (Ibid). It must be pointed out here that there have also been observable and counter-tendencies to globalization that often manifest themselves in the form of nationalism and sub-nationalism, racism, religious fundamentalism, sexism etc. Thus both universal and parochial tendencies are at work in the process of globalization and diaspora formation.

Within these broad parameters it can be argued that certain aspects of globalization are particularly relevant to the study of diasporas in terms of their emergence, survival and success. Following Cohen (1999: 157) these are briefly discussed as follows: (1) A world economy with quicker and denser transactions between its sub-sectors due to better communications, cheaper transport, a new international division of labour, the activities of transnational corporations and the effects of liberal trade and capital-flow policies; (2) Forms of international migration that emphasize contractual relationships, family visits, intermittent stays abroad and sojourning, as opposed to permanent settlement and the exclusive adoption of the citizenship of a destination country; (3) The development of “global cities” in response to the intensification of transactions and interactions between the different segments of the world economy and their concentration in certain cities whose significance resides more in their global, rather than in their national, roles; (4) The creation of cosmopolitan and local cultures promoting or reacting to globalization; and (5) A deterritorialization of social identity challenging the hegemonising nation-states’

claim to make an exclusive citizenship a defining focus of allegiance and fidelity in favour of overlapping, permeable and multiple forms of identification. To sum up, globalisation has not only accelerated the processes of international migration and formation of diasporas, it has also strengthened Diaspora-homeland linkages.

Indian Diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific Region

Indian cultural influence throughout Southeast Asia and parts of Pacific region predates the spread of Islam there during the medieval period and the formation of the Indian diaspora in modern times. This influence which was very deep can be seen in languages, literature as well as social and religious customs of the region. Temples of Angkor Wat, Pagan, Borobudur and Prambanan bear evidence to the deep penetration of Indian art and architectural forms in these famous Southeast Asian monuments. Some of these monuments surpass the grandeur of Indian temples from the same period. Because of this contact, Southeast Asia also created many literary works based on the Ramayana but with something distinctively their own.

Evidently, the instigators of these cultural contacts were mainly Indian traders, and to a lesser extent the scholars and religious preachers. Needless to say, the Indian diasporas formed during the ancient and medieval periods, if any, got fully assimilated into their respective host societies, except in the cases of the two neighbouring countries, Sri Lanka and Nepal. As Tinker (1977: 1-2) put it; “Yet none of these contacts led to a distinctive Indian population overseas. Indian priests and officials married local women, and within a few generations were indistinguishable from local people. Even Bali, the most complete Hindu cultural colony, is no little India. Hindu culture has been transmuted into something authentically Balinese.” Therefore this paper focuses only on the modern phase of the Indian diaspora in the region whose beginnings can be traced back to the late 18th century or so.

Migration Patterns. The first four patterns of Indian emigration abroad mentioned above are represented in the formation of the Indian diasporas in the ASEAN-Pacific region. Thus indentured labour recruitment prevailed in Fiji and initially in Malaya, *Kangani/maistry* labour recruitment systems in Malaya and Burma, and passage/free migration pattern in case of Hong Kong, Japan, Philippines and Thailand. The “new” Indian diasporas in Australia and New Zealand, South Korea and partly in Japan have mainly been the results of “brain drain” type emigration from India

(Table 1). In recent decades the Gulf-type contract/voluntary labour migration from India to Malaysia has also revived in a big way (Marimuthu 2015). Needless to say, there has been considerable overlapping in these migration patterns, especially during the colonial period.

Table 1: Aspects of Indian Migration to Select Countries of ASEAN-Pacific Region

| Country | Migration Patterns | Period of Migration | Major Ethnic Groups | Occupational Structure |
|-------------|--|---------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Fiji | Indenture; Passage | 1879-1930 | North Indians, Tamils, Gujarati and Punjabi | Agriculture, Professionals and others |
| Malaysia | Indenture; Kan-gani; Passage; "Brain drain" type | 1786 onwards | Tamils, Punjabis | Agriculture, Professionals and others |
| Myanmar | Maistry + Passage | 1852-1937 | Tamils, Chhetiyars, North Indians | Agriculture and Trade |
| Singapore | Free/ Passage; "brain drain" type | 1871 onwards | Tamils, Malayalis and Punjabis | Professionals and Traders |
| Hong Kong | Free/ Passage; "brain drain" type | 1841- 1997 | Parsis, Sindhis and Punjabis | Traders; professionals |
| Japan | Free/ Passage; "brain | 1873 onwards | Parsis, Sindhis | Traders; professionals |
| Philippines | Free/ Passage | 1792 onwards | Parsis, Punjabis | Traders |
| Thailand | Free/ Passage; "Brain drain" type | 1912 onwards | Sindhis, Punjabis, Jains | Traders; professionals |
| Australia | "Brain Drain" Type | 1960 onwards | Punjabis, Gujaratis, Kannadigas and Indo-Fijians | Professionals and others |
| New Zealand | "Brain Drain" Type | 1960 onwards | Gujaratis, Punjabis, Indo-Fijians | Professionals and others |

Volume and Destination

Between 1834 and 1937 about 30.0 million Indians migrated to different parts of the world, and about 24.0 million returned home during the same period (Jain 1990: 10; Davis 1968: 59). It is difficult to say with certainty as to how many Indians migrated to the ASEAN-Pacific region to date; perhaps about 10.0 million. Until 1957 about 4.2 million Indians immigrated into Malaysia (Sandhu 1969: 159), and perhaps as many into Burma. Between 1873 and 1920

about 69,000 indentured labourers were recruited for Fiji (Gillion 1962; Lal 1983). Australia and New Zealand can claim about 800,000 Indian immigrants to date, and perhaps as many for the rest of the countries of the ASEAN-Pacific region.

Stock of Indian Diaspora in the Region

Presently there are over 7.3 million Indians – both PIOs and NRIs in the ASEAN-Pacific region countries. This represents about 20.0% of the total numerical strength of the global Indian diaspora. The relevant data about Indian diasporas in the region for the year 2001 and 2018 are presented in Table 2 and 3 respectively. Accordingly, in 2001, a total of about 5.7 million Indians were residing in the region. Myanmar hosted the largest one in the region (about 3.0 million), followed by Malaysia (1.7 million), Fiji (337,000), Singapore (307,000), Australia (190,000), Thailand (85,000), New Zealand (55,000), Indonesia (55,000) and Hong Kong (50,500),

China, in spite of its large population and economy did not have a sizeable population of Indian emigrants until very recently, perhaps mainly due to the tense bilateral relations in the aftermath of the 1962 India-China war. Thus in 2001 there were only 305 (5 PIOs and 300 NRIs) Indians in China (Table 2). The Sixth National Population Census of China enumerated the Indian population in China at 15,051 which increased to 56,050 (550 PIOs and 55,500 NRIs) by 2018 (Table 3). Most of these Indians are students, traders and professionals working for banks, Indian companies and MNCs. In 2019 there were about 21,000 Indian medical students in China.

In terms of citizenship status of the Indians in the region, it was said that an overwhelming majority of them (88%) in the year 2001 were the citizens of their respective host country; about 3.5% held Indian citizenship, and about 8.0% were stateless. As per 2001 data, the distribution pattern of the Indian diaspora in the region vis-à-vis other regions of the world, was unique in that: (1) the proportion of stateless Indians was very high, and (2) the proportion of NRIs (that is, the Indian passport holders) was very low. Comparable figures for the stateless Indians in the region in 2018 are not available, but the proportion and the number of NRIs (1,202,828) vis-à-vis the PIOs (6,100,279) continued to be very low. The total Indian diaspora population in the ASEAN-Pacific region thus was estimated to be a little more than 7.3 million (Table 3).

Table 2: Population Estimates of Indian Diaspora in

ASEAN-Pacific Region, 2001

| Country | PIOs | NRIs | Stateless | Total |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Australia | 160,000 | 30,000 | - | 190,000 |
| Brunei | 500 | 7,000 | 100 | 7,600 |
| Cambodia | 150 | 150 | - | 300 |
| China | 5 | 300 | - | 305 |
| Fiji | 336,579 | 250 | - | 336,829 |
| Hong Kong | 28,500 | 22,000 | - | 50,500 |
| Indonesia | 50,000 | 5,000 | - | 55,000 |
| Japan | 1,000 | 9,000 | - | 10,000 |
| Korea (DPRK) | - | 5 | - | 5 |
| Korea (ROK) | 200 | 2,500 | - | 2,700 |
| Laos | 18 | 107 | - | 125 |
| Malaysia | 1,600,000 | 15,000 | 50,000 | 1,665,000 |
| Myanmar | 2,500,000 | 2,000 | 400,000 | 2,902,000 |
| New Zealand | 50,000 | 5,000 | - | 55,000 |
| Philippines | 24,000 | 2,000 | 12,000 | 38,000 |
| Singapore | 217,000 | 90,000 | - | 307,000 |
| Taiwan | 1,800 | 00 | - | 1,800 |
| Thailand | 70,000 | 15,000 | - | 85,000 |
| Vietnam | - | 320 | - | 320 |
| Total | 5,039,752 | 205,632 | 462,100 | 5,707,484 |

Source: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (2001: xlvii-mlx).

Table 3: Indian Diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific Region, 2018

| S. No. | Country | PIOs | NRIs | Total |
|--------|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| 1. | Australia | 255,000 | 241,000 | 496,000 |
| 2. | Brunei | 269 | 11,500 | 11,769 |
| 3. | Cambodia | 10 | 1,500 | 1,510 |
| 4. | China | 55,500 | 550 | 56,050 |
| 5. | Fiji | 313,798 | 1,400 | 315,198 |
| 6. | Hong Kong | 7,160 | 31,509 | 38,729 |
| 7. | Indonesia | 1,11500 | 8,500 | 120,000 |
| 8. | Japan | 686 | 37,933 | 38,619 |
| 9. | Laos | 78 | 450 | 628 |
| 10. | Malaysia | 2,760,000 | 227,950 | 2,987,950 |
| 11. | Myanmar | 2,000,000 | 9,207 | 2,009,207 |

| | | | | |
|------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 12. | New Zealand | 160,000 | 80,000 | 240,000 |
| 13. | North Korea | 1 | 15 | 16 |
| 14. | Philippines | 15,000 | 105,000 | 120,000 |
| 15. | Singapore | 300,000 | 350,000 | 650,000 |
| 16. | South Korea | 349 | 13,236 | 13,585 |
| 17. | Taiwan | 278 | 3,068 | 3,446 |
| 18. | Timor-Leste | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| 19. | Thailand | 175,000 | 20,000 | 195,000 |
| 20.. | Vietnam | 500 | 5,000 | 5,500 |
| | Total | 6,100,279 | 1,202,928 | 7,303,207 |

Source: MEA, GOI (Decemer 31, 2018) http://mea.gov.in/NRIs-and-PIOs_1.pdf

A cursory look at the data in Tables 2 and 3 clearly suggests that in the ASEAN-Pacific region the Indian diaspora population increased by about 1.6 million during 2001 and 2018. The increase can be seen consistently across the countries, except in the case of Myanmar where the strength of the Indian diaspora went down by about 900,000. This trend is difficult to explain except in terms of either assimilation of the Indians within the Burmese society, or their self-relocation outside the country. This certainly requires further investigation.

The Indian diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific region is considerably heterogeneous. Table 1 attempts to make some sense of this heterogeneity in terms of migration patterns, period of migration, and more importantly major sub-ethnic/regional Indian groups and their occupational structure of the Indian diaspora. Parsis, Sindhis, Chettiars, Punjabis, Jains and Gujarati Hindus have been exclusively traders and entrepreneurs. The Indian professionals have an all-India character in terms of their composition. The labouring class mainly emerged from Tamil Nadu and to a lesser extent, particularly in Fiji, from North India.

Table 4: The Sindhi Diaspora in ASEAN-Pacific Region, 1999

| Country | Estimates of the Size of the Sindhi Community | Occupational Structure |
|-------------|---|------------------------|
| Singapore | 5,000 | Mostly trading |
| Malaysia | 1,000 | Mostly trading |
| Hong Kong | 7,500 | Exclusively trading |
| Indonesia | 3,500 | Exclusively trading |
| Philippines | 4,000 | Exclusively trading |

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Thailand | 1,000 (?) | Exclusively trading |
| Japan | 1,000 (?) | Exclusively trading |
| Taiwan | 200 (?) | Exclusively trading |
| South Korea | 200 (?) | Exclusively trading |
| Total | 23,000- 25,000 | |

Source: Marcovits (2000: 281).

Contributions of the Indian Diaspora to the ASEAN-Pacific Region

Historically Indian diaspora vitally contributed to the development to the ASEAN-Pacific region and continues to do so in its current phase of existence in the various countries. Since modern organized diasporas constitute trans-state triadic networks involving ethnic diasporas, their host countries and homelands, they also have significant ramifications for international relations and international politics, and other activities. Some of the major Indian diasporic activities in the region are briefly discussed under the economic, political and socio-cultural contributions.

Economic Development

Indian Diaspora's contribution to the economic development of the ASEAN-Pacific region is extremely important and exemplary. This can fruitfully be discussed in terms of the contribution of Indian diaspora's three major components, namely labour, traders and entrepreneurs, and professional-technical manpower. These are briefly discussed below.

Indian Labour Diaspora

As already mentioned, until the last decade of the 20th century, the Indian Diaspora in the region had mainly been labour diaspora. In case of Malaysia, for example, until 1957 about two-thirds of the total Indian immigration involved labour who worked in sugar, coffee and rubber plantations. The rubber and subsequently oil-palm plantations are totally dependent on Indian labour power. It was the Tamil labour that made Malaysia the world's largest producer of natural rubber. Some idea of this can be had from the fact that the acreages under rubber had increased from about 50,000 in 1900 to 543,000 in 1911 and 3,272,000 in 1938, mainly due to the availability of Indian *Kangani* labour. Likewise, rice plantation in Burma owes mainly to Indian labour which constituted bulk of the Indian population in Burma numbering more than a million in 1931. In Fiji, the Indian indentured labour had been

the backbone of the sugar industry since the late 19th century. As late as in 1976 about 39 percent of the economically active Fiji Indians were employed in agriculture (Naidu 1989: 119). Elsewhere in the region Indians were engaged in fruit and vegetable gardening in the countryside of Wellington and Auckland during the inter-war period and in numerous factory jobs subsequently (McGee 1989: 144). A parallel situation obtained in Australia where most members of Punjabi farming communities of Woolgoolga worked as banana-farmers (Voigt-Graf 2003: 156).

Traders and Entrepreneurs

In modern times the role of Indian merchants in South-East Asia particularly that of Chulia merchants and Tamilian Muslims, can be traced back to the 17th century. Following the occupation of the island of Penang in 1786 these merchants increased "their operations, both in the tin trade as well in various commodities imported from the coast of Coromandel. It was in the opium trade, which emerged as one of the most lucrative sectors of the Indian economy after 1770, that this conjunction between British private traders and Indian merchants produced its most spectacular results" (Marcovits 2000: 14). In the opium trade mentioned above Marwaris, Sindhis and Parsis were particularly involved.

There is perhaps no major country in Asia-Pacific where Indians have not been present either as traders or entrepreneurs. Until the end of the 20th century, in Hong Kong, Japan, Philippines and Thailand Indian Diaspora had primarily been involved in trade and entrepreneurship. In January 1841 when the Union Jack was hoisted at Possession Point, about 2,700 Indian troops and 4 Indian merchants witnessed the historic ceremony (Vaid 1989a: 146). Subsequently Parsis, Ismailis (Bohra and Khojah), Jews and Sindhis from the sub-continent established their businesses in Hong Kong. The early merchants and traders particularly the Parsis played a major role in the development of Hong Kong. The Indians "started the star ferry, they owned all big hotels, ran their own ships, established Hong Kong University, brought over several banks from homeland, and were associated with the setting up of the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank" (Vaid 1989a: 151). Hardly constituting 4 percent of the total of Hong Kong, total Indian companies in Hong Kong are responsible for over 10 percent of the colony's total foreign trade" (Daswani 1989: 159).

Like Hong Kong, the history of Indian entrepreneurship in Japan has been dominated by Parsis and Sindhis

in that order (e.g. Table 4). By 1912 “these were about 25 Indian firms in Japan mainly in Yokohama. Subsequently many Indians moved to Kobe area after an earthquake in 1923 and diversified into Tokyo for the World War II. The Indians were and continues to be in the forefront in export of Japanese goods in India, Middle East and Africa. The major items involved have been electronic items, automobile parts, silk yarn and rayon garments, cotton prices goods, singlet, matting and porcelain wares (see Chandru 1989: 164-65; See also Buxani 2003). In recent decades the Indian traders have been joined by the new breed of entrepreneurs, engineers and Information Technology professionals (Kaur 2015).

In recent years the economic cooperation between India and ASEAN countries is on the rise. India became a sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992, and a full dialogue partner in 1995. The two have held annual summits since 2002. In 2009 a free-trade agreement between India and ASEAN was signed that came into force from January 2010. The pact has “led to India excluding 489 items from the list of tariff concessions and 590 items from the list of tariff elimination to address sensitivities in agriculture, textile, auto, chemicals, crude and refined palm oil, coffee, tea, pepper, etc.” (*The Times of India*, New Delhi, August 14, 2009). The pact would eventually eliminate duty by 2016 on 80% of the goods traded between India and ASEAN countries. More immediate impact of the pact was the acceleration of the trade between India and ASEAN countries that had grown from \$40 billion in 2008-09 to \$50 billion in 2009-10 (*Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 29th October 2010, p. 9). In 2020-21 India-ASEAN bilateral trade stood close to \$87 billion.

Professionals and other Middle Classes

During the colonial period migration of Indian professionals as well as numerous other categories of personnel was a regular feature in major countries of South East Asia and the Pacific region. Thus in case of Malaysia a large number of administrators, supervisors, clerks, teachers, doctors, lawyers, soldiers, policemen and watchmen, etc (Sandhu 1969; Roff 1967) were recruited who manned the various sectors of the economy. The pattern was typical. In Malaysia, for example, different categories of workers were known by their respective nick-names. As one observer put it “with the advent of the British, the role of the Indians as catalysts took on a new direction and emphasis. A new genre of Indian immigrant – Ramasmay, the labourer, Tuls Ram, the convict, Bhai Singh, the policemen,

Maniam, the technical assistant and Pillai, the clerk – arrived in the country” (Sandhu 1989: 128). Similar situations obtained in Burma, Fiji, Hong Kong and subsequently in Australia and New Zealand. These non-labouring middle classes were instrumental in the development of the countries of the region. During the past three decades or so, a new generation of Indian professionals has joined the workforce in the region. They include personnel in banking and finance sectors as well as information technology. Others work for various UN bodies, multinational companies, research establishments and NGOs.

It would not be out of place here to mention the presence of the sizeable community of Indian students particularly in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, who are regarded as “semi-finished human capital” and “potential migrants”. As visiting trade minister of New Zealand Jim Sutton had put it in India in 2000; “finished degree in New Zealand, land a job, move on to residency and then took citizenship”. Since April, 2008 Indian students in Australia can work twenty hours per week while studying. Vast majority of these students belong to Information Technology, Engineering, Basic Sciences, Management, Medicine and other professional courses.

Among the historic roles played by the Indian soldiers, for example, two events need special mention here. Both are related to the British conquests in the region. In January 1841 Hong Kong was conquered by the British with the help of 2,700 Indian troops (Vaid 1989a: 146). Similarly, the British expeditionary force that occupied the Philippines in 1762 included a contingent of over 600 Indian sepoy and 1,400 labourers who were mostly recruited from among the subjects of Nawab of Arcot in South India (Rye 1989: 136). The “Madrasis”, who constituted about half of the total British expeditionary force, “were a curious mixture of “mercenaries” and “indentured” labour. Following the lifting of the British occupation of Manila a sizeable number of them stayed back in Philippines and subsequently settled down in different parts of Luzon, especially in the small town of Cainta. They were nicknamed “Bombays” – a name that subsequently was extended to Indian sailors, Indian immigrants and to the Indians in general in the Philippines (Rye 1989: 139).

Political Contribution

Indian diaspora have played significant role in political development of various countries of the ASEAN-Pacific region, particularly in Fiji, Malaysia, Singapore and

Hong Kong. Their numerical strength in Fiji permitted them to play the fullest possible role resulting eventually in Mahendra Choudhary becoming the Prime Minister of the country. It was not easy given the historical machinations of the colonial government and their implications for post-colonial political developments. In Fiji as also in Malaysia, Singapore and Burma the first political awakening among the Indians during the inter-war period had begun to crystallize due to their desire to remedy their skewed positions in their respective countries' civic and political lives. Not surprisingly, political developments among Indians were accompanied by strong trade union movements (Jain 1988; 1990).

Indian diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific region had been in the forefront of the anti-colonial movements. The activities of Indian National Army (INA) raised by the Indian leader and freedom fighter Subhash Chandra Bose was an eloquent testimony to this phenomenon in which overseas Indians in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Burma vigorously participated not only by getting recruited in the Army but also by raising funds in cash and kind (jewellery). So much so that a women army brigade named after the famous patriot queen of Jhansi, Rani Laxmi Bai, fought valiantly along with their male counterpart for getting rid of British colonialism in India. As pointed out by Marcovits (2007: 267), Indian nationalists in India thought of activities of INA and other such movements as "dispersed fragments of a great Indian nation-in-the-making who had their role to play in the struggle for freedom".

India had not only been in the forefront of anti-colonial movement that inspired a large number of countries in Asia and Africa, since independence she has also been a role model for most Third World countries for practising democracy. This is more so given that the American democracy is today increasingly suspect in the eyes of the world. In spite of a number of weaknesses in Indian democracy, namely, "tenacious poverty and inequality, troubling levels of political violence and criminality in some states, and a fragmented political party system that makes it difficult to take decisions" (Dimond 2007), the members of the Indian diaspora feel proud of their political system back home and collectively try their best to bring about democratic culture in their respective host countries. Diasporas require democracy in order to survive and maintain their distinct identities. Conversely, lost diasporas can sometimes be revived in a democratic political environment.

The political protest in November 2007 needs to be seen in this context in which more than 20,000 ethnic Indians demonstrated in Kuala Lumpur demanding equality and fair treatments for Indians, who at that time constituted about 8 percent of Malaysia's 27 million population. The New Economic Policy being practised by the state in favour of Malay *Bhumiputeras* (sons of the soil) since 1970 favours Malays at the expense of Indian and Chinese minorities and breeds ethnic/racial discrimination (Jain, 1990: 94-134; Stenson 1980). Political developments in Fiji during the post-independence period have caused a large number of Indians to emigrate to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and elsewhere. From Burma/Myanmar thousands of Indians had not only been expelled in 1937 and again in 1964, about half a million of them have been rendered stateless. The remaining Indians, over 2.5 million have increasingly been subjected to Burmese assimilation. Reports coming out from Myanmar about Indians' socio-economic and political conditions is pathetic, to say the least.

Most diasporas being in minority often serve as *vigilante* against human rights violations in various countries. In fact it is in their self interest to promote and support human rights norms in their host countries. Fortunately several international organisations such as the United Nations, International Labour Organisation, World Trade Organisation etc. today are with them in bringing about just and equitable socio-political order the world over. In this context the role of local civil societies is equally important.

Socio-Cultural Contribution

We already noted that cultural and civilisational influence of India on most of South-East Asia and that part of Asia-Pacific region which is generally known as "far East", or "East Asia". Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that India and Asia-Pacific region had a great civilisational dialogue during the ancient and medieval periods. Following the establishment of Indian diaspora in modern times this influence has now said to have been extended to practically the whole region.

Whereas the earlier influence was very deep mainly emanating from Buddhism as well as Hinduism, the contemporary influence is directly associated with the presence of Indian diasporic communities and sub-communities there. In other words, it can be said that

Indian diaspora in Asia-Pacific region has historically contributed to the formation of heterogeneous and/or “plural societies” – a trend that is growing worldwide with the accelerated pace of migration and globalization in the past few decades. Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Hong Kong, Thailand and Australia and New Zealand have been culturally enriched by the presence of Indians in these countries. The major cities in ASEAN-Pacific region owe their cosmopolitanism to a considerable extent to the presence of the Indian diaspora.

Indian diasporas in the ASEAN-Pacific region can be credited to have brought with them an alternative lifestyle typically emanating from Indian culture and civilization. Apart from moderate, tolerant and liberal value system, ethnic Indian cuisines (both South and North Indian, particularly curries and tandoori items), Homeopathic and Ayurvedic therapies and medicines and various Yoga systems are being increasingly adopted by the population at large. Last but not the least, the Bollywood and other Indian films have been giving a tough competition to local as well as Hollywood films. Ethnic Indian television, radio and print media have also been a contributing factor to the cause of multiculturalism in the ASEAN-Pacific region.

The major countries in the ASEAN-Pacific region have been multi-ethnic/multi-racial societies. Ethnic/racial inequalities and discrimination have therefore always been contentious issues in such plural societies. Colonial rulers’ divide and rule policy had created racially fractured societies, post-colonial authoritarian regimes and democratic politics have tended to perpetuate them. Fiji and Malaysia are two examples of such societies where Indians have been at the receiving ends. In spite of somewhat difficult race relations situations of Indian diaspora in some ASEAN-Pacific countries, the Indian government has been following a policy of non-alignment and non-interference in the internal matters of other countries.

One sub-regional initiative, that is, Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) has also complimented India-ASEAN regional economic cooperation – forming a bridge between SAARC and ASEAN (Khadaria 2006). With the most countries of the Pacific region India has equally good economic and political relations. Terming India’s partnership with ASEAN as the foundation of its “Look East Policy” Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had declared in November 2011: “Greater physical connectivity between India and ASEAN remains our

strategic objectives” (The Indian Express, New Delhi, 20 November 2011). Obviously, he was referring to the proposals to link the two regions by land and sea which include the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway, its extension to Laos and Cambodia, and the development of a new highway linking Vietnam.

The recent revival of the QUAD – a strategic organization of Australia, Japan, India and the USA has added altogether a new dimension to the security of the small nations of the ASEAN region as well as that of its member states. This was necessitated by Chinese expansionist policy in the South China Sea in particular and against a number of third world countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America in general. The QUAD assumes significance in the face of the following emergent development in South Asia region during and after the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan and its takeover by Taliban terrorist outfits, growing strategic ties between Pakistan and China, Chinese aggressive designs and activities on the Line of Control, continuing terrorist threats on the part of Pakistan in Jammu & Kashmir. Uncertain political situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan has also given opportunity to ISIS factions to expand their activities in India, especially in Jammu & Kashmir.

In an effort to broaden the prospects of cultural tourism, representatives of India, ASEAN countries, private tourist operators and experts have been discussing for the past few years ways to explore Buddhist pilgrimage tourism in their respective countries. The cultural ties between the two regions have also strengthened with the active involvement of some of the countries of the ASEAN-Pacific region by reviving the ancient Nalanda University in Bihar in India.

Diaspora-Homeland and Inter-Diaspora Linkages

All diasporas by definition maintains close relations with their homeland. These relations encompasses wide gamut of activities: business networking, remittances, political lobbying, marriage relations, pilgrimages, tourism, socio-cultural exchange programmes etc. Inter-diaspora relations also encompass all such activities giving rise to trans-nationalism, which broadly refers to sustained ties of persons, networks and organisations across nation state borders rising out of international migration and refugee flows. Globalisation and new information technologies and communication have served as catalysts in promoting new transnational kinship groups, transnational social circuits and transnational communities. Indian diaspora

is no exception in this regard. In which case a number of Indian sub-diasporas based on region and language, religion and even caste have been formed in different parts of the world (Sahoo 2006). Thus, we have Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, Gujarati, Tamil, Sindhi and Dalit diasporas with each of them having their own global diasporic networking (Barrier 1990; Marcovits 2000; Jain 2011; Vertovec 2000).

Transnational associations such as the “Global Organisation of the People of Indian Origin” (GOPIO) have emerged to preserve and promote their identities and cultures uniting India and the Indian diaspora in a transnational context. Conceptually speaking, both diaspora-homeland and inter-diaspora linkages have been consolidated horizontally as well as vertically.

Diaspora-homeland relations in the region have further been strengthened with the institution of Prabasi Bhartiya Samman Awards (PBSAs) in 2003. The major objective of these Indian Government awards is to honour diaspora-specific individual or collective excellence in the fields of trade, profession, community service, bilateral relations, etc. A list of PBS awardees in the ASEAN-Pacific-region is presented in Table 5. Of the total of 269 PBSAs globally given by the Government of India during 2003-2021 period, 50 were claimed by the members of the overseas Indian communities in the ASEAN-Pacific region. The country-wise distribution of these awards was as follows: Australia, Fiji and New Zealand 7 each, Japan and Malaysia 6 each, Hong Kong 5, Thailand 4, Philippines and Singapore 2 each, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia and Myanmar 1 each. No overseas Indian has as yet received this award from China, Laos, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. Individual details of PBSA recipient in terms of gender, year and field of award is provided in Table 5. Of the total awardees, 37 were male, 8 female, and 4 associations which included Australia India Society of Victoria; Shri Ramkrishna Mission, Fiji; Sai Prema Foundation, Fiji; and Singapore Indian Association.

Table 5: Country-wise Distribution of Pravasi Bhartiya Samman Awardees in ASEAN-Pacific Region, 2003-2021

| Sl No | Country | Name | Gender | Year | Field/Activity |
|-------|-----------|-------------------------------------|--------|------|-------------------|
| 1 | Australia | Australia India Society of Victoria | Agency | 2013 | Community Service |

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|------|-------------------------------|
| 2 | Australia | Dr. Gorur Krishna Harinath | Male | 2017 | Community Service |
| 3 | Australia | Mala Mehta | Female | 2015 | Education & Community Service |
| 4 | Australia | Ms. Senator Lisa Singh | Female | 2014 | Public Service |
| 5 | Australia | Nihal Singh Agar | Male | 2019 | Social Service |
| 6 | Australia | Prof. Veena Harbhagwan Sahajwalla | Female | 2011 | Science |
| 7 | Australia | Shri Neville Joseph Roach | Male | 2008 | Community Service |
| 8 | Brunei Darussalam | Nazeer Ahamed Mohamed Zackariah | Male | 2017 | Community Service |
| 9 | Brunei Darussalam | Shri Mohinder Singh Bhullar | Male | 2010 | Community Service |
| 10 | Cambodia | Mr. Sachchidanand Sahai | Male | 2012 | Promoting India |
| 11 | Fiji | Ramakrishna Mission | Agency | 2014 | Community Service |
| 12 | Fiji | Sai Prema Foundation | Agency | 2021 | Community Service |
| 13 | Fiji | Shri Mahendra Pal Chaudhry | Male | 2004 | Public Affairs |
| 14 | Fiji | Shri Vijay Singh | Male | 2005 | Sports |
| 15 | Fiji | Shri Yanktish Permal Reddy | Male | 2010 | Community Service |
| 16 | Fiji | Sir Moti Tikaram | Male | 2007 | Public Affairs |
| 17 | Fiji | Vinod Chandra Patel | Male | 2017 | Social Service |
| 18 | Hong Kong | Dr. Hari N. Harilela | Male | 2003 | Business |
| 19 | Hong Kong | Mr. Lal Lokumal Chellaram | Male | 2021 | Community Service |
| 20 | Hong Kong | Shri Harindrapal Singh Banga | Male | 2011 | Business |
| 21 | Hong Kong | Shri M. Arunachalam | Male | 2005 | Business |
| 22 | Hong Kong | Shri Rusy M. Shroff | Male | 2006 | Business |
| 23 | Indonesia | Mr. Prakash Lohia | Male | 2012 | Business |

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------|------------------------------------|--------|------|---------------------------------|
| 24 | Japan | (Smt.) Dr. Ruby Umesh Pawankar | Female | 2010 | Medicine |
| 25 | Japan | Dr. (Prof.) Muralidhar Miryala | Male | 2021 | Science & Technology |
| 26 | Japan | Mr. Rajib Shaw | Male | 2021 | Education |
| 27 | Japan | Prof Sandip Kumar Tagore | Male | 2017 | Academics & Arts |
| 28 | Japan | Shri A. P. S. Mani | Male | 2008 | Community Service |
| 29 | Japan | Shri Ryuko Hira | Male | 2010 | Community Service |
| 30 | Laos | No | No | No | No |
| 31 | Malaysia | Dato Seri S. Samyvellu | Male | 2003 | Public Affairs |
| 32 | Malaysia | Dr. Muniandy Thambirajah | Male | 2017 | Education and Community Service |
| 33 | Malaysia | Tan Sri Dato' Ajit Singh | Male | 2011 | Public Affairs |
| 34 | Malaysia | Tan Sri Dato Dr. K. R. Somasundram | Male | 2007 | Public Affairs |
| 35 | Malaysia | Tan Sri G. Vadiveloo | Male | 2009 | Public Service |
| 36 | Malaysia | Tan Sri Ravindran Menon | Male | 2013 | Community Service |
| 37 | Myanmar | Satya Narayan Goenka | Male | 2019 | Business Management |
| 38 | New Zealand | Bhavdeep Singh Dhillon | Male | 2019 | Business |
| 39 | New Zealand | Dr. Satendra Kumar Singh | Male | 2013 | Community Service |
| 40 | New Zealand | Hon. Ms. Priyanca Radhakrishnan | Female | 2021 | Public Service |
| 41 | New Zealand | Judge Ajit Swaran Singh | Male | 2008 | Public Service |
| 42 | New Zealand | Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi | Male | 2015 | Public Service |
| 43 | New Zealand | Sir Anand Sanyanand | Male | 2011 | Public Affairs |
| 44 | New Zealand | Smt. Sukhi Turner | Female | 2004 | Public Affairs |
| 45 | North Korea | No | No | No | No |

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------|-------------------------------|--------|------|----------------------|
| 46 | Philippines | Dr. Sant Singh Virmani | Male | 2005 | Agricultural Science |
| 47 | Philippines | Smt. Pratima Kale | Female | 2006 | Rural Development |
| 48 | Singapore | Mr. S.R. Nathan | Male | 2012 | Public Service |
| 49 | Singapore | Singapore Indian Association | Agency | 2017 | Community Service |
| 50 | South Korea | No | No | No | No |
| 51 | Taiwan | No | No | No | No |
| 52 | Thailand | Mr. Vashdev Tikamdas Purswani | Male | 2021 | Business |
| 53 | Thailand | Shri Deepak Mittal | Male | 2010 | Business |
| 54 | Thailand | Shri Shivnath Rai Bajaj | Male | 2006 | Business |
| 55 | Thailand | Susheel Kumar Saraff | Male | 2017 | Business |
| 56 | Timor-Leste | No | No | No | No |
| 57 | Vietnam | No | No | No | No |

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India web links. For the data of the period 2003-2019, follow the web link <https://www.mea.gov.in/pravasi-bharatiya-samman.htm>; and for 2021 data the web link is <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33381/ravasi+Bharatiya+Samman+Awards+2021> Retrieved on 10th April, 2021.

In ASEAN-Pacific region both pan-Indian and sub-ethnic diasporas are actively involved in various activities directed at India and among themselves. Thus, Indian diasporas in Malaysia, Singapore and Fiji are very active members of GOPIO which is a non-partisan non-sectarian global organisation engaged in promoting well being of non-resident Indians and people of Indian origin, enhancing cooperation and communication between groups of Indians living in different countries and in furthering their cooperation with India. through GOPIO as well as independently Indian diasporic communities have been the active participants in Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (Overseas Indian Day) celebrated in India on 9th of January each year since 2003.

The Indian diasporas in ASEAN-Pacific region are similarly well integrated horizontally as well as in relation to their motherland. One can mention here Tamil, Malayali, Sikh/Punjabi, Sindhi and Jain diasporas (Jain 2011). In the case of Sindhi diaspora in the region – small one that constituted about 25,000 individuals in 2001 (Table 4), is particularly illustrative here. The Sindhi diaspora, exclusively a trade diaspora,

has been in ASEAN-Pacific region since the middle of the 19th century. It is extremely well integrated not only within the region but also with their counterparts around the world, particularly in India and the Gulf countries. Sindhis are mainly in general merchandise, food stuffs, textile and electronic goods trade. Sindhis in the region procure textile and electronic goods mainly from Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia through their diasporic network and trade them on to Dubai and India for distribution in Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe (See Buxani 2003). Hong Kong has particularly emerged as a major center of Sindhi socio-cultural, literary and intellectual activities. A magazine “Indian Opinion” is published from here and several kinds of awards have been instituted in order to promote and sustain Sindhi pride worldwide.

Business networking apart, trans-nationalism among Indians can also be seen in religious and socio-cultural activities in ASEAN-Pacific region. A number of Indian religious sects, such as Swaminarayan, Chinmaya Mission, Ramakrishna Mission, Bramha Kumaris, International society for Krishna Consciousness, etc. have extensive global networking. Similarly, Indian festivals like Deepawali, Holi, Dushehra, Shivaratri, Thai Poosam, etc. have acquired universal status among Indian diasporas. Indian diasporic writings too are part of not only local or regional literature but also of Indian and the world literatures.

Diaspora Philanthropy and Development in India

Philanthropy can be defined as private giving for public purposes. The need for diaspora philanthropy emerges from the sentimental attachments the individuals have for their homeland – the “long distance nationalism”. “Transfer to countries of origin may include goods and services, investments, and remittances as well as intangible aspects such as knowledge, contacts, and values. These flows are neither necessarily mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive” (Merz, et. al. 2007: 3).

In case of India it has been found in a number of studies that (i) philanthropic activities are channeled through professional, regional (based on region of origin) and religious organisations, and (ii) that philanthropic giving is mainly directed to development related causes in India, specially in fields such as healthcare and education (Kumar 2003; Manivannan 2006).

Economic development in India has significantly been

affected over the years by the Indian diaspora through the remittances and transfer of knowledge and skills. In 2001, India received foreign remittances to the tune of \$9.0 billion that amounted to about 2.0 percent of its GDP. In 2007, the remittances figure was about \$27.0 billion which increased to about \$70 billion by 2019 – bulk of this coming from the Persian Gulf countries, North America and Europe. Unfortunately, there are no separate data available to know as to how much remittances came from ASEAN-Pacific region.

Concluding Remarks

India’s relations with the Southeast Asian region have been not only the oldest but also the most impressive and deep. The ancient legacies of Hinduism and Buddhism have left indelible marks throughout the region. Even in countries where subsequently Islam became the state religion, the earlier socio-cultural legacies of Hinduism and Buddhism could not be obliterated. This kind of influence however was mainly socio-cultural and should not be confused with the Indian Diasporic presence in contemporary sense of the term. The Indian diasporic presence in the region in modern times that began sometime in the 17th century however has added altogether new dimension to the countries of the region – elements of social and cultural pluralism.

About seven million strong Indian diaspora in the ASEAN-Pacific region consists of sizable minorities in Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Australia, New Zealand and Thailand, and very small ones in rest of the countries of the region. However, the political situation in Myanmar has reduced the existence of the Indian diaspora there to that of only historical/archival significance as pressure to assimilate has been intense for several decades now. More than half a million stateless Indians by the turn of the 21st century was another problematic area for the Government of India that has recently started a dialogue with the Myanmar authorities.

As “auxiliary” minorities, the old Indian diaspora contributed substantially to the economic and socio-political developments of the region. Just as the labouring and non-labouring Indian emigrants vitally fulfilled the economic needs of the British colonialism in south-east Asia, under the change circumstances the new Indian diaspora consisting of varied professionals is likewise engaged in activities that have been enriching the countries of the region economically and otherwise. With liberal emigration policy pursued by

the Government of India since 2001, the new diaspora is likely to increase numerically in future.

Diaspora by definition is a trans-border phenomenon. The increased pace of globalisation and transnationalism have caused diasporas to integrate themselves horizontally as well as vertically with their respective homelands. In coming years, the world over not only more and more new diasporas would emerge and get consolidated but the older diasporas would also get strengthened giving rise to multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and a global society and even a global civilization.

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